Rights to Pleasure:
Representations of Sexuality and Social Taboos in Philosophy and Cinema

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Bulletin description

Rights to Pleasure will confront the ethics of sexuality, the polemics of erotic awakening and sexual freedoms, and the history of social taboo. The seminar will focus on different attempts to reject sexual taboos departing from cinematic representations on the topic. Seminar discussions will question the concept of identity and established gender roles, the theory and practice of sexual freedoms and the institutionalization of normality. Rights to Pleasure will explore the process of identity-making as a process in permanent flux and dialogue with cultural and political contexts.

Detailed description

Rights to Pleasure will rethink the concept of individual freedom as well as the experience of embracing ambiguity and the right to remain in permanent flux, outside the official labels and categories of fixed normalized sexuality and established identity categories. How are sexual rights connected to political freedoms? How is pleasure a precondition for contemporary understandings of justice, liberty and equality? This course will establish meaningful connections between the ethics of difference and evolving definitions of identity.

Students in the Gender & Sexuality Minor and Critical Visual Studies, as well as those interested in cultural history, 21st century cinema and the ethics of difference, will engage in a critical and active reflection of the topics outlined in the course’s program. Prior to each session, students will view one film and read the required assigned readings to which they will respond in the course’s online forum on LMS. In-class discussions will dissect key scenes from the assigned film as they illustrate the central arguments in the assigned readings. In addition, students will react to current affairs discussions covered in by the international press as a way of recognizing the pertinence of the themes and questions addressed in the seminars. The instructor will post one weekly “current affairs debate” in connection with the film and readings of the week, as a way of reinforcing the historical context of the issues raised in each week’s visual and academic reading material.

Rights to Pleasure will combine an introductory lecture (20 mins) with class discussion of the assigned readings (50 mins), film excerpt analysis (20 mins), small group discussions (10 mins)
and examination of historical context and reception of the film and academic debates of the week (50 mins). The students of Rights to Pleasure will participate actively in the seminar discussion and develop original ideas for their final papers due at the end of the semester.

**Course Calendar/Schedule**

**Week 1: The Polemic of Religion and Sexuality**

**Film Excerpts and Required Viewing:**
- Magdalene Sisters (Peter Mullan, 2002)
- Bad Education (Pedro Almodóvar, 2004)

**Required Readings:**
* James M. Smith, “(Ef)acing Ireland’s Magdalen Survivors: Visual Representations and Documentary Testimony”, Ireland’s Magdalen Laundries and the Nation’s Architecture of Containment (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007)
* Marvin D’Lugo, “Postnostalgia in Bad Education: Written on the Body of Sara Montiel”, All About Almodóvar (University of Minnesota Press, 2009)

**Week 2: Erotic Awakening and the Escape from Marital Boredom**

**Film Excerpts and Required Viewing:**
- Y tu Mamá También (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001)
- Post Tenebras Lux (Carlos Reygadas, 2012)

**Required Readings:**
* Marquis de Sade, “To Libertines”, Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings (Grove Press, 1965)
* Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality, Vol. 3 The Care of the Self

**Week 3: Women as Colonizers**

**Film Excerpts and Required Viewing:**
White Material (Claire Denis, 2009)

Required Readings:
* Megan Ratner and Claire Denis, “Moving toward the Unknown Other: An Interview with Claire Denis”, Cinéaste, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter 2010), pp. 36-40.
* Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Intruder”, Corpus (Fordham University Press, 2008)

Week 4: Women’s Sex Tourism

Film Excerpts and Required Viewing:
   Heading South (Laurent Cantet, 2005)

Required Readings:
* Simone de Beauvoir, “Part One”, The Second Sex (Vintage, 2012)

Week 5: Phallic Hegemonies

Film Excerpts and Required Viewing:
   Love (Gaspard Noé, 2015)

Suggested Films:
   Romance (Catherine Breillat, 1999)
   The People vs. Larry Flynt (Milos Forman, 1996)

Required Readings:

Week 6: The School of Shame

Film Excerpts and Required Viewing:
The Holy Girl (Lucrecia Martel, 2005)
Géminis (Albertina Carri, 2005)

Required Readings:

Week 7: The Right to Ambiguity

Films and Required Viewing:
La vie d’Adèle (Abdellatif Kechiche, 2013)

Required Readings:
*Elisabeth D. Däumer, “Extracts from Queer Ethics; or, the Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics (1992)”, Bisexuality: A Critical Reader (Routledge, 1999)

Week 8: The Ethics of Difference

Film Excerpts & Required Viewing:
XXY (Lucía Puenzo, 2007)
Required Readings:
* Alice Domurat Dreger, “But my God Woman, You are a Man!”, “Doubtful Status”, “In Search of the Veritable Vulva”, Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex (Harvard University Press, 2000)
* Elizabeth Reis, “From Monsters to Deceivers”, Bodies in Doubt (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012)
* Jeffrey Eugenides, “Looking Myself Up In Webster’s”, Middlesex (Picador, 2002)

Week 9: Sexuality and Political Repression

Film Excerpts & Required Viewing:
Aimée & Jaguar (Max Färberböck, 1999)
Before Night Falls (Julian Schnabel, 2000)

Required Readings:

Week 10: Female Outcasts

Film Excerpts & Required Viewing:
Mustang (Deniz Gamze Ergüven, 2015)
Fire (Deepa Mehta, 1999)

Required Readings:
Week 11: Simulated Pleasures

Film Excerpts and Required Viewing:
Ex-Machina (Alex Garland, 2015)

Required Readings:
*Sherry Turkle, “What does Simulation Want?”, Simulation and its Discontents (The MIT Press, 2009)

Week 12: Games of Pleasure

Film Excerpts and Required Viewing:
The Dreamers (Bernardo Bertolucci, 2003)

Required Reading:
*Raoul Vaneigem, The Revolution of Everyday Life (Online)
*Paco Ignacio Taibo II, “Loves that Last”, “Why Che and Bob Dylan were important for some but not for all”, “Of Women and Matresses”, “In which we return to the idea of ghosts and their persistence”, ‘68 (Seven Stories Press, 2004)

Week 13: The Pleasure of Revenge

Film Excerpts and Required Viewing:
The Skin I Live In (Pedro Almodóvar, 2011)

Required Readings:

Week 14: Student Presentations

Week 15: Partial Memories, Accidents and Fantasies
Film Excerpts and Required Viewing:
Mulholland Drive (David Lynch, 2001)

Required Readings:

Bibliography

Simone de Beauvoir, Second Sex (Vintage, 2012)
Simone de Beauvoir, Ethics of Ambiguity (Open Road, 2011)
Eric Berkowitz, Sex and Punishment: Four Thousand Years of Judging Desire (Counterpoint, 2013)
Elizabeth Bernstein, Regulating Sex: The Politics of Intimacy and Identity (Routledge, 2004)
Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Anti-Œdipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (University of Minnesota Press, 1994)
Jeffrey Eugenides, Middlesex (Picador, 2002)
Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason (Vintage, 1988)
Luce Irigaray, Democracy begins between Two (Routledge, 2013)
Annamarie Jagose, Lesbian Utopics (Routledge, 1994).

L. O’Connell and P. Cryle, Libertine Enlightenment (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

James Steintrager, The autonomy of pleasure: libertines, license, and sexual revolution (Columbia University Press, 2016)

Marilyn Strathern, Before and After Gender: Sexual Mythologies of Everyday Life (Hau Books, 2016)

Lisa K. Taylor, Jasmine Zine, Muslim Women, Transnational Feminism and the Ethics of Pedagogy: Contested Imaginaries in Post-9/11 Cultural Practice (Routledge, 2014)
